

April 03, 2003- Blue Dog Coalition to Chase Down Help for First Responders

April 3, 2003 Sanchez Joins Blue Dog Coalition to Chase Down Help for First Responders
Group Asks President for More Flexible, Streamlined Funding

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Blue Dog Coalition issued a letter today to President Bush asking for more flexibility in the way funding is allocated to first responders. The group, led by its own Homeland Security Task Force, expressed concern that appropriated first responder funds have remained unallocated, taken too long to be distributed, or have been tangled up in red tape. The Coalition acknowledges that even though many disagree on the amount of homeland security funding, getting already-approved funding to those who need it quickly is a critical step that must be taken.

"Existing elevated security levels create an automatic, unfunded federal mandate for those standing guard for the nation's security," said Rep. Loretta Sanchez, Member of the House Homeland Security Committee and Ranking Member on the Infrastructure and Border Security Subcommittee. "Without the updated training and equipment local first responders need, their only recourse is to put more personnel on duty. Unfortunately, there is little to no discretionary funding being provided for these additional costs. These are not exorbitant requests. We are asking for basic resources for our frontline troops at home."

The letter urges the president to make all remaining appropriated first responder funds available. Currently, \$100 million appropriated in FY 2003 for high threat urban areas remains unallocated. The Coalition also asks the president to waive administrative and bureaucratic requirements that unnecessarily restrict the flow of funds. Whereas disaster recovery funds can take as little as three to seven days to be distributed by FEMA, homeland security funding for first responders can often take months, limit allowable expenses, and go through intermediaries before funds reach the necessary first responder agencies.

The Coalition contends in its economic plan that "Homeland Security Equals Economic Security." The group maintains that often times, at relatively low costs, swift and necessary improvements in local security can be achieved with changes in the funding mechanism. In some cases, purchasing one piece of equipment or providing a few additional hours of training can be the difference between security and uncertainty. The letter concludes, "We would not send our troops to war in Iraq without support, training, and equipment they deserve. We should do nothing less for those on the front lines here at home."

April 3, 2003

President George W. Bush
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As Members of the Blue Dog Coalition, we seek a fiscally responsible way to provide real homeland and hometown security. While Congress and others have debated at length the appropriate amount of federal first responder funding, we want to move past the top-line to the front-line.

We are very concerned that appropriated first responder funds remain unallocated, and that getting these funds to first responders takes too long. As you have said, we are in a war against terrorism and our first responders are on the front lines. It's time to move beyond business-as-usual bureaucracy and find new ways to secure our hometowns.

Current first responder grant programs take months, limit allowable expenses, and go through intermediaries before funds reach the responders. One hundred million dollars for high threat urban areas appropriated in FY03 remain unspent. We need a system that works as quickly as when we release disaster recovery funds. When a hurricane or earthquake strikes, FEMA can cut a check to individuals and families within 3 to 7 days. A similarly expeditious flow of funds to cover our communities' immediate and genuine homeland security needs will greatly enhance our nation's preparedness.

We urge you to make all appropriated first responder funds remaining in federal departments available and to waive administrative regulations that unnecessarily restrict the flow of funds.

The homeland security needs of the smaller towns around the country we represent should also be met. At relatively low cost, swift and significant improvements in local security can be achieved. In many cases, acquiring a single piece of

equipment or providing a few additional hours of training can make the difference between real security and continued uncertainty. That strikes us as a pretty good deal.

Wartime is not a time for a business as usual. The war on terrorism is being fought on a number of fronts, including in our hometowns. We would not send our troops to war in Iraq without the support, training and equipment they deserve. We should do nothing less for those on the front lines here at home.

Sincerely,

Members of the Blue Dog Coalition